

SUPPLEMENTAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION

WR.2.E

INFORMATIVE

Varying Sentence Length

Lessons WR.2.A–G offer direct instruction on discrete skills and should be implemented between Lessons 10 and 11. Students may benefit from some or all of the instruction in these lessons; only those lessons or activities that address student needs should be implemented.

Introduction

This lesson is composed of two distinct but related activities that center on skills for effectively varying sentence length to improve informative writing. Each activity may last an entire class period.

Writing Instruction Options:

- Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons
- Splitting Sentences

In this lesson, the teacher provides direct instruction to students on combining sentences using semicolons and colons. Students also practice splitting sentences to improve the clarity of their writing. Students focus on revising their own informative drafts for effectively combining sentences using semicolons and colons or for splitting sentences before transitioning to a peer discussion of revisions. Student learning is assessed via the completion of the WR.2 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length, on which each student records one example of a successful revision.

For homework, students choose three different passages from their informative papers and revise each passage focusing on effectively combining sentences using semicolons and colons or splitting sentences as necessary to strengthen their writing. Students also write a few sentences explaining whether or not they will keep the revisions they drafted and the impact this decision has on their informative papers.

Standards

Assessed Standard(s)	
W.9-10.5	Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

L.9-10.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
L.9-10.2.a, b	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. a. Use a semicolon (and perhaps a conjunctive adverb) to link two or more closely related independent clauses. b. Use a colon to introduce a list or quotation.
Addressed Standard(s)	
W.9-10.2.c	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content. c. Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.
W.9-10.6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.
SL.9-10.1	Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on <i>grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues</i> , building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Assessment

Assessment(s)
<p>Student learning is assessed via completion of the WR.2 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length. Students record the original passage from their informative papers as well as the revised passage. Students then explain why the revision is effective.</p> <p>i Consider assessing these revisions using the Informative Writing Checklist.</p>
High Performance Response(s)
<p>A High Performance Response should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record the original passage (e.g., The author’s family also avoided wasting anything. Instead of throwing away cotton bags, the material was “washed, bleached, and cut into dish cloths and towels” (Hastings).). Revise the original passage, focusing on combining sentences using semicolons and/or colons or

splitting sentences (e.g., The author’s family also avoided wasting anything: instead of throwing away cotton bags, the material was “washed, bleached, and cut into dish cloths and towels” (Hastings).).

- Explain why the revision is effective (e.g., I combined these sentences using a colon to highlight how the second part of the sentence provides information to support the first part.).

[See the Model WR.2 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length for more examples.](#)

Lesson Agenda/Overview

Student-Facing Agenda	% of Lesson
Standards:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standards: W.9-10.5, L.9-10.1, L.9-10.2.a, b, W.9-10.2.c, W.9-10.6, SL.9-10.1 	
Learning Sequence:	
1. Introduction of Lesson Agenda	1. 5%
2. Homework Accountability	2. 0%
3. Writing Instruction Options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons • Splitting Sentences 	3. 30%
4. Informative Writing Checklist	4. 5%
5. Individual Revision	5. 30%
6. Revision Discussion	6. 20%
7. WR.2 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length	7. 5%
8. Closing	8. 5%

Materials

- Student copies of the up-to-date Informative Writing Checklist (refer to WR.2 Lesson D Model Informative Writing Checklist)
- Copies of the WR.2 Revision Exit Slip: _____ for each student (refer to WR.2 Lesson A)—students will need additional blank copies
- Copies of the Semicolon and Colon Handout for each student

Learning Sequence

How to Use the Learning Sequence	
Symbol	Type of Text & Interpretation of the Symbol
10%	Percentage indicates the percentage of lesson time each activity should take.
no symbol	Plain text indicates teacher action.
	Bold text indicates questions for the teacher to ask students.
	<i>Italicized text indicates a vocabulary word.</i>
▶	Indicates student action(s).
☞	Indicates possible student response(s) to teacher questions.
ⓘ	Indicates instructional notes for the teacher.

Activity 1: Introduction of Lesson Agenda

5%

Begin by reviewing the agenda. In this lesson, students learn how to combine sentences using semicolons and colons or how to split sentences to strengthen their writing. Students revise their own drafts before participating in a peer discussion of their individual revisions.

- ▶ Students look at the agenda.

Activity 2: Homework Accountability

0%

- ⓘ Students will be held accountable for homework during Activity 6: Revision Discussion.

Activity 3: Writing Instruction Options

30%

- ⓘ Based on student need, select from the two options below:
 - Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons (See Appendix 1)
 - Splitting Sentences (See Appendix 2)

Activity 4: Informative Writing Checklist

5%

- ⓘ The following activity addresses the expectations of SL.9-10.1.

Instruct students to take out their copies of the Informative Writing Checklist.

- ⓘ Consider posting or projecting the Informative Writing Checklist.

Instruct students to Think, Pair, Share about the following questions:

Based on this lesson’s writing instruction, what items should the class add to the Informative Writing Checklist? In which categories do these items belong and why?

- 🗨 Student responses will vary but should include points that address the following:
- Correctly incorporate semicolons and colons to make my writing clearer? This item belongs in the Control of Conventions category, because it is about proper use of punctuation.
 - Include sentences of varied length that contribute to the cohesion and clarity of my informative writing? This item belongs in the Coherence, Organization, and Style category, because varying sentence length affects both the coherence and style of informative writing.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses. Guide students to a consensus on what items the class will add to the Informative Writing Checklist and in which category each item belongs. Instruct students to add the new items in the appropriate categories to their copies of the Informative Writing Checklist.

- ▶ Students add new items in the appropriate categories to their copies of the Informative Writing Checklist.

① Consider adding the new items in the appropriate categories to the displayed copy of the Informative Writing Checklist.

Activity 5: Individual Revision

30%

① The following activity addresses the expectations of W.9-10.2.c.

Instruct students to independently revise their drafts focusing on whichever of the following writing skills they learned in this lesson:

- Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons
 - Splitting Sentences
- ① For example, if students completed the writing instruction activity on Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons, then their revisions will focus on using semicolons and colons to combine sentences rather than on splitting sentences.

Explain to students that they should revise at least three passages for effectively combining sentences using semicolons and colons or for splitting sentences. Remind students to refer to the Informative Writing Checklist as they revise their drafts.

Transition to individual revision.

- ▶ Students independently revise their drafts for effectively combining sentences using semicolons and colons or for splitting sentences.

🗨️ For sample revisions, see the Model WR.2 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length.

Activity 6: Revision Discussion

20%

① The following activity addresses the expectations of SL.9-10.1.

Instruct students to form pairs or small groups to share at least one of the passages they revised during the previous activity and one passage they revised during the previous lesson’s homework assignment. Explain to students that in addition to receiving feedback on their revisions, this discussion is also an opportunity to consider how they can use similar revisions or try similar techniques as their peers in their own papers. In this discussion, students provide brief constructive criticism to their peers. Remind students that constructive criticism helps them share advice with their peers in a positive and academic manner.

① Refer to Lesson 8 for a discussion of constructive criticism.

Instruct students to follow these steps to complete the revision discussion:

1. Show your peers the original passage and the revised passage.
2. Explain to your peers how the revision improves your draft.
3. Ask your peers to provide brief constructive criticism on your revisions.
 - ▶ Students share and discuss with peers at least two effective revisions they made to their drafts.

① In lessons that include the Revision Discussion, consider maintaining the same peer pairs or small groups for several lessons, so that students can benefit from a reviewer who is familiar with their drafts.

Activity 7: WR.2 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length

5%

Explain that for this lesson’s assessment, students record and explain one example of a successful revision. Distribute blank copies of the WR.2 Revision Exit Slip: _____ to each student. Instruct students to fill in the title “Varying Sentence Length” on their exit slips. Instruct students to complete the exit slip independently. Inform students that their revisions will be assessed with the Informative Writing Checklist.

🗨️ See the High Performance Response and Model WR.2 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length for sample student responses.

Activity 8: Closing

5%

Display and distribute the homework assignment. For homework, instruct students to choose three different passages from their drafts. For each passage, students revise their drafts focusing on whichever of the following writing skills they learned in this lesson:

- Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons
- Splitting Sentences

Instruct students to respond briefly in writing to the following questions for each revision:

Will you keep the revision you drafted? Why or why not?

Explain the impact of your decision on your informative paper.

- ① If an online writing community has been established for the class, instruct students to post their revised drafts for sharing with peers and/or assessment. (Students' use of the online writing community addresses the expectations of W.9-10.6.)
 - ▶ Students follow along.

Homework

Choose three different passages from your draft. For each passage, revise your draft focusing on whichever of the following writing skills you learned in this lesson:

- Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons
- Splitting Sentences

Respond briefly in writing to the following questions for each revision:

Will you keep the revision you drafted? Why or why not?

Explain the impact of your decision on your informative paper.

Model Informative Writing Checklist

Name:		Class:		Date:	
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Directions: Use this template to record the checklist items that convey the components of an effective informative paper established as a class.

Command of Evidence	Drafting	Finalization
Does my response...	✓	✓
Use relevant and sufficient evidence to develop my subtopics?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Integrate evidence (quotations and paraphrasing) to support the claim and develop subtopics?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anticipate and address the audience’s knowledge level?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Coherence, Organization, and Style	Drafting	Finalization
Does my response...	✓	✓
Clearly introduce a topic?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Develop a precise claim about the topic?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include subtopics that develop the topic and support the claim?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adapt content and language to my specific audience?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Clearly state each subtopic?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have an introduction that engages the reader’s attention and interest?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provide a conclusion that follows from and supports the informative paper?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use precise language to clearly explain the topic?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use domain-specific vocabulary to clearly explain the topic?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include varied syntax to contribute to a cohesive informative paper?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Include transitional words and phrases that clearly show the relationship between sentences and paragraphs?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Include sentences of varied length that contribute to the cohesion and clarity of my informative writing?*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Control of Conventions	Drafting	Finalization
Does my response...	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Cite sources using proper MLA style and formatting?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Use proper punctuation for quotations and citations?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Correctly incorporate semicolons and colons to make my writing clearer?*	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

*Asterisks indicate new items added in this lesson.

Model WR.2 Revision Exit Slip: Varying Sentence Length

Name:		Class:		Date:	
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Directions: In the first column, record the original passage from your informative paper. In the second column, record the revised passage. In the third column, explain why the revision is effective.

Original Passage	Revised Passage	Explanation
Millions of Americans struggled to meet their basic needs. This struggle forced many people to find creative ways to survive and prompted them to use government programs for help.	Millions of Americans struggled to meet their basic needs; this struggle forced many people to find creative ways to survive and prompted them to use government programs for help.	I used a semicolon to combine independent clauses in order to show that these ideas are connected.
The author’s family also avoided wasting anything. Instead of throwing away cotton bags, the material was “washed, bleached, and cut into dish cloths and towels” (Hastings).	The author’s family also avoided wasting anything: instead of throwing away cotton bags, the material was “washed, bleached, and cut into dish cloths and towels” (Hastings).	I combined these sentences using a colon to highlight how the second part of the sentence provides information to support the first part.
The 1920s in America were prosperous times, but starting in 1929 and lasting over a ten-year period, the Great Depression affected all Americans, rich and poor alike.	The 1920s in America were prosperous times. But starting in 1929 and lasting over a ten-year period, the Great Depression affected all Americans, rich and poor alike.	I split this long sentence to emphasize and clarify the difference between the 1920s and what happened in 1929.

Appendix 1: Combining Sentences Using Semicolons and Colons

Explain to students that they can strengthen the clarity with which they communicate the claim, subtopics, and evidence in their informative papers by using semicolons and colons properly and effectively. Varying sentence length by combining sentences with semicolons or colons contributes to an engaging, cohesive informative paper.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** If necessary, explain that *cohesion* in writing refers to how well the paragraphs and sentences link the claims and evidence of a text together into a coherent whole.
 - ▶ Students write the definition of *cohesion* in the appropriate section of their vocabulary journals.

Explain to students that they must understand what an *independent clause* is in order to use semicolons and colons properly.

- ① Students may be familiar with the components of an *independent clause*. Consider asking students to volunteer an explanation of what an *independent clause* is and provide an example before providing the definition of an *independent clause* to the class.

Provide students with the following definition: *independent clause* means “a clause that can stand alone as a sentence, containing a subject and a predicate with a finite verb.” An *independent clause* communicates a complete thought.

- ▶ Students write the definition of *independent clause* in the appropriate section of their vocabulary journals.

Post or project the following example of an independent clause.

- ① The following example is taken from paragraph 1 of the article “The New Deal” (refer to Lesson 3).
 - “Roosevelt worked quickly upon his election to deliver the New Deal.”

Ask a student volunteer to identify the elements of the independent clause given above.

- 🗨 Student responses should include:
 - The subject is “Roosevelt.”
 - The predicate is everything following “Roosevelt” with “worked” as the main verb of the sentence.

- ① **Differentiation Consideration:** Students may need more support in understanding the components of a complete sentence in order to understand independent clauses. Consider reviewing and posting the definitions and examples for the parts of speech such as *subject*, *predicate*, and *verb*.

- ▶ Students write the definitions of *subject*, *predicate*, and *verb* in the appropriate section of their vocabulary journals.

Explain to students that semicolons are a type of punctuation that can be used to connect two independent clauses and show they are related. Post or project the following example for students:

① The following examples have been modified from paragraph 5 of the article “Firing, Not Hiring” by Nancy Hayes (refer to Lesson 5).

- **Example 1:** They postponed plans to expand. They reduced production levels, laid off employees, or closed stores and offices altogether.

Then, post or project the following example of the two sentences linked with a semicolon:

- **Example 2:** They postponed plans to expand; they reduced production levels, laid off employees, or closed stores and offices altogether.

Explain to students that it is possible to keep two distinct sentences instead of joining the independent clauses with a semicolon, but when the ideas are closely linked, combining the sentences can contribute to the cohesion and flow of the passage.

Inform students that semicolons are just one way of combining sentences. Writers can use commas and conjunctions or transitional words or phrases to combine independent clauses (e.g., They postponed plans to expand, and they reduced production levels, laid off employees, or closed stores and offices altogether.).

- ▶ Students follow along.

① Lesson D and Lesson F provide instruction on transitional words and phrases and comma usage, respectively.

Post or project the following paragraph and instruct students to work in pairs or small groups to practice combining sentences using semicolons, conjunctions, or transitional words or phrases. Encourage students to vary their methods of combining sentences. Explain to students that they may want to leave some short sentences to vary the length of sentences throughout the paragraph and to emphasize certain ideas with short sentences.

① The following example is modified from paragraph 6 of the Model Informative Paper (refer to WR.2 Lesson 10).

- The Great Depression was the longest and most severe economic crisis of the twentieth century. It deeply affected the people who lived through it. Millions of Americans struggled to meet their basic needs. This struggle forced many people to find creative ways to survive. This hardship prompted them to use government programs for help. Americans faced unimaginably difficult times. They had to use available resources. They were able to persevere through the end of the Great Depression.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion in which volunteers share how and why they combined sentences.

① The following sample student response is taken from paragraph 6 of the Model Informative Paper (refer to Lesson 10).

🗨 Student responses may include:

- As the longest and most severe economic crisis of the twentieth century, the Great Depression deeply affected the people who lived through it. Millions of Americans struggled to meet their basic needs, but this struggle forced many people to find creative ways to survive and prompted them to use government programs for help. Although Americans faced unimaginably difficult times, their ability to use the resources available to them ultimately helped them persevere through the end of the Great Depression.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** Some students may struggle to immediately grasp the proper use of semicolons. If students struggle, work with them individually to write out 5–10 examples of the proper use of semicolons.

Explain to students that a colon is another type of punctuation that is useful for combining related independent clauses. Post or project the following examples:

① The following examples can also be found on the Semicolon and Colon Handout.

- **Example 1:** The newly homeless endured awful living conditions: “In larger cities, the homeless congregated in abandoned lots and constructed makeshift ‘homes’ of scrap wood” (Hayes).
- **Example 2:** The men were all sent to do the following forestry work: digging ditches, building reservoirs, and planting trees.
- **Example 3:** In addition to losing jobs, many Americans also lacked any savings to use during such an emergency: millions of people lost their entire life savings when banks collapsed (Hayes).

① Consider informing students that in Example 3, a semicolon is also appropriate.

Instruct students to work in pairs or small groups to describe the three different uses for colons.

🗨 Student responses should include:

- In example 1, the colon links together one independent clause and a quotation that is a complete sentence. This suggests that a colon can be used to introduce a quotation after an independent clause when the quotation itself is also an independent clause.
- In example 2, the colon comes after an independent clause and before a list. This shows that a colon can be used to introduce a list.

- In example 3, the colon is between two independent clauses. The second independent clause seems to explain the idea in the first clause that “many Americans also lacked any savings.” This suggests that a colon can be used to link two independent clauses when the second clause provides more detail about or emphasizes the first clause.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion of student responses.

Distribute the Semicolon and Colon Handout to each student. Encourage students to use this handout as a reference for proper and common uses of semicolons and colons.

- ▶ Students examine the handout.

① **Differentiation Consideration:** Some students may struggle to immediately grasp the proper use of colons. If students struggle, work with them individually to write out 5–10 examples of the proper use of colons.

Semicolon and Colon Handout

Remember that an *independent clause* is “a clause that can stand alone as a sentence, containing a subject and a predicate with a finite verb.” An *independent clause* communicates a complete thought.

Common and Proper Uses of the Semicolon:

- Use a semicolon to connect two independent clauses that are related to one another.
 - Example: They postponed plans to expand; they reduced production levels, laid off employees, or closed stores and offices altogether.

Common and Proper Uses of the Colon:

- Use a colon when introducing a quotation after an independent clause. The quotation must also be an independent clause.
 - Example: The newly homeless endured awful living conditions: “In larger cities, the homeless congregated in abandoned lots and constructed makeshift ‘homes’ of scrap wood” (Hayes).
- Use a colon when introducing a list.
 - Example: The men were all sent to do the following forestry work: digging ditches, building reservoirs, and planting trees.
- Use a colon between two independent clauses when the second clause provides more detail about or emphasizes the first clause.
 - Example: In addition to losing jobs, many Americans also lacked any savings to use during such an emergency: millions of people lost their entire life savings when banks collapsed (Hayes).

Further reference: The Purdue University Online Writing Lab (OWL): <http://owl.english.purdue.edu> (search terms: semi-colons and colons).

Appendix 2: Splitting Sentences

Explain that writers often combine sentences to show connections between ideas and to make writing flow smoothly; however, sometimes writers split long sentences into shorter sentences in order to vary sentence length or make ideas stand out. Splitting long sentences can also help writers express complex ideas in a clearer way that may be easier to read and understand.

Post or project the following paragraph and instruct students to work in pairs or small groups to practice splitting sentences by replacing commas and conjunctions or transitional words and phrases with periods. Explain to students that they may not want to split all of the sentences in order to vary the length of sentences throughout the paragraph.

① The following example is taken from paragraph 5 of the Model Informative Paper (refer to Lesson 10).

- Farmers could take advantage of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which “subsidized farmers for reducing crops and provided loans for farmers facing bankruptcy” (“The New Deal”). Paying farmers to plant less and lending them money to support their farms helped farmers stay in business through the Great Depression. By offering work and relief, the New Deal programs encouraged Americans facing many different situations to look to the government for help surviving the Great Depression.

Lead a brief whole-class discussion in which volunteers share how and why they split sentences.

🗨 Student responses may include:

- Farmers could take advantage of the Agricultural Adjustment Act. The act “subsidized farmers for reducing crops and provided loans for farmers facing bankruptcy” (“The New Deal”), and farmers stayed in business through the Great Depression. They were paid to plant less and were lent money to support their farms. New Deal programs encouraged Americans to look to the government for help surviving the Great Depression.